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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

+ Secretary-General is deeply concerned at continuing fighting in region of Nagorno-Karabakh which has resulted in many deaths in recent weeks.

+ Secretary-General urges Government of Myanmar to "rectify causes of tragic situation" which, he says, poses threat to stability of region; calls on international community to assist refugees fleeing into Bangladesh.

+ Secretary-General recommends that Security Council enlarge mandate of United Nations Angola Verification Mission to include division to monitor elections scheduled for September.

+ Secretary-General reaffirms his commitment to equality between women and men in statement on occasion of International Women's Day observed at United Nations Headquarters today.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed deep concern at the continuing fighting in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan which has resulted in many deaths in recent weeks.

In a statement at Headquarters today, the Secretary-General said the situation was particularly alarming because Azerbaijan, as well as Armenia, had recently joined the United Nations, thereby assuming a solemn obligation under the United Nations Charter to resolve disputes by peaceful means.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali expressed hope for an immediate end to the fighting and that the parties would settle their disputes in accordance with their obligations as Member States of the United Nations, and in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(more)

For information media--not an official record

In related news, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced today that an aircraft would leave Geneva on Saturday, 7 March for Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, carrying 11 delegates and three tonnes of emergency medical supplies.

The Committee said its main concern was to get help as quickly as possible to the victims, both Azeri and Armenian, of the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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The Secretary-General has called on the international community to render its full support to United Nations efforts to assist the large number of refugees fleeing from Myanmar into Bangladesh, placing a heavy burden on that country.

In a statement at Headquarters today, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said he was "seriously concerned" at the situation in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, and called on that Government to take all necessary action to "rectify the causes of this tragic situation", which, he said, if not addressed urgently, would "threaten the stability of the region and increase human suffering".

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is currently in the process of assisting Bangladesh in dealing with the crisis.

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Much has been achieved in implementation of the Angola peace process, but much remains to be done to ensure that elections will take place in September as foreseen in the Peace Accords, states Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. He has therefore recommended that the Security Council enlarge the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola (UNAVEM) to include an electoral division for the purpose of assisting the Angolan parties in the holding of elections.

The Angolan Government and the opposition movement -- known as UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) -- agreed last May on a United Nations monitored peace plan to end sixteen years of civil war in that country.

In his report to the Security Council, dated 3 March, the Secretary-General said that despite some incidents, there had been no major violation of the cease-fire. He described that as "an outstanding achievement" by the parties, but urged that the timetable for implementation of the Peace Accords not be "delayed further" and that all Angolan parties and forces join together urgently in making renewed commitments to the realization of the elections.

(more)

Mr. Boutros-Ghali noted that, if approved by the Security Council, the "new role for the United Nations" in Angola would be a "daunting challenge" given the devastated condition of the country with regard to lack of infrastructure as well as administrative and political instability.

The Secretary-General's report is based, among other things, on observations made by his Special Representative, Margaret Anstee, who is the Chief of UNAVEM II and who visited Angola from 17 to 20 February. An office of the Special Representative is expected to be established this month in Luanda.
(S/23671)

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today reaffirmed his commitment to equality between women and men in a statement delivered on the occasion of International Women's Day observed today at the United Nations. The Day will be observed world-wide on Sunday, 8 March.

In his address to the staff this morning, the Secretary-General pointed to his long record in the area of women's equality dating back to the 1950's with the appointment of Ms. Horeya Megahad as the first woman Assistant in the Department of Political Science at Cairo University. Professor Megahad is now head of the Department and a Member of the People's Assembly.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali acknowledged that there was still much to be done to achieve equality in the United Nations Secretariat saying that "unless women are assured of a work place free of bias, in which they can compete under conditions of equality, we cannot expect to attract the calibre of women we need".

The recruitment freeze, instituted as a necessary step while staff resources were being considered, would clearly slow down efforts to increase the number of women in the staff, the Secretary-General said. However, women would be given every opportunity to serve in the new peace-keeping operations that are being mounted. At the same time, he said, women would be asked to serve at higher levels as replacements for staff who have left for mission service.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali went on to say that he understood the concerns of the General Service staff, most of whom are women, and their frustration over limited prospects for advancement. However, he said, the restructuring of the secretarial occupation had not yet produced an acceptable overall solution.

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